

TIP TOP WEEKLY

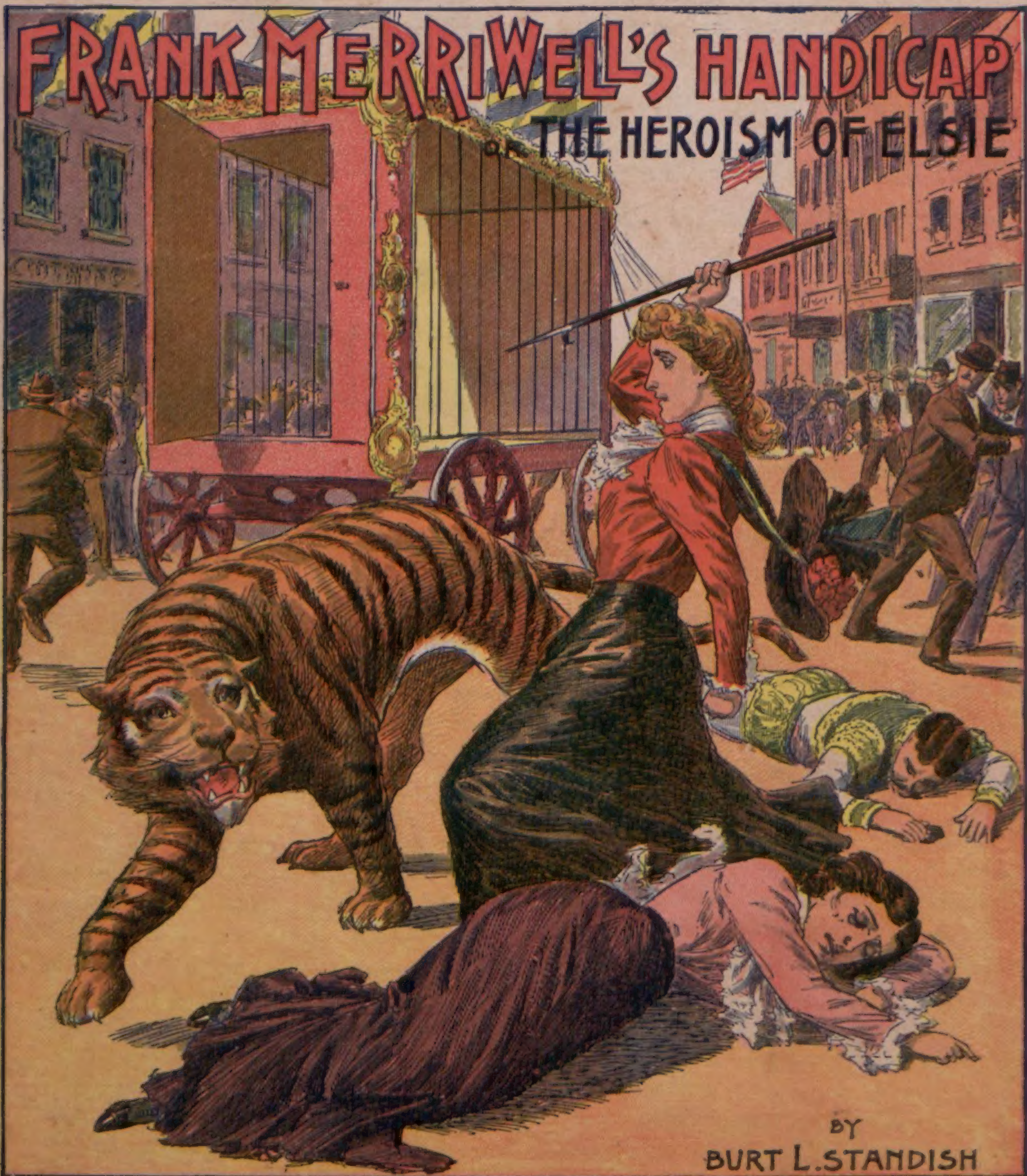
"An ideal publication for the American Youth"

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No. 213.

Price, Five Cents.

FRANK MERRIWELL'S HANDICAP OF THE HEROISM OF ELSIE



BY
BURT L. STANDISH

ELSIE BELLWOOD LEAPED BETWEEN THE TIGER AND INZA.

TIP TOP WEEKLY

AN IDEAL PUBLICATION FOR THE AMERICAN YOUTH



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NEW YORK, May 12, 1900.

Price Five Cents.

Frank Merriwell's Handicap;

OR,

THE HEROISM OF ELSIE.

By BURT L. STANDISH.

CHAPTER I.

A RUNAWAY AUTOMOBILE.

"Li, there! Hook out!" shouted Harry Rattleton.

"Hi, there! Look out!" echoed Bart Hodge, getting the words straight which Harry had twisted.

"Get out of the way, fellows!" warned Jack Diamond.

The juice that it's loaded with must be bug juice!" squealed Danny Griswold. "It's crazy drunk!"

"Tut-tut-tut-turn the cuc-crank the other way!" bellowed Joe Gamp.

"This crank," said Bink Stubbs, giv-

ing Gamp a twist that spun him round like a top.

"I've always believed that more than half of these new-fangled inventions are devices of Satan, and now I know it!" grumbled Dismal Jones.

"You'll be more certain of it than ever if you let it run over you!" Merriwell warned, stepping to the sidewalk and drawing Dismal's lank body quickly back from the street.

"Huah! It's worse than a cranky horse!" Bruce Browning reached down, took Danny Griswold by the collar, and placed the little fellow behind him.

"Unselfishly trying to save your bacon at the expense of my own!" Browning suavely explained, as Danny began to fume. "Do you want that thing to step on you?"

An electric hansom, which had sailed up the street in an eminently respectable manner, had suddenly and without apparent reason begun to act in an altogether disreputable way. It had veered round, rushed over the crossing, and made a bee line for the sidewalk, almost running down a party of Frank Merriwell's friends, who were out for an afternoon stroll on the street in the pleasant spring sunshine.

The motorman, who occupied a grandstand seat in the rear, seemed to have lost control of the automobile. He was excitedly fumbling with his levers, but without being able to bring the carriage to a stop.

The street was crowded with people at the time, and when the electric carriage began to cut its eccentric capers there was a rush for places of safety, while the air was filled with excited cries and exclamations.

Merriwell could see the head of a passenger, a man, through the window of the automobile.

"She's cuc'-coming this way again!" shouted Gamp. "Look out, fellows!"

The front tires struck the curbing with such force that the motorman was pitched from his high seat, landing heavily on his head in the gutter.

Bruce Browning was one of the first to reach him.

"Give him air!" Bruce commanded, lifting the man in his arms and stepping toward a drug store on the corner.

Some of the crowd streamed after Browning, but by far the greater number remained to watch the antics of the automobile.

The man inside was fumbling at the door and trying to get out.

The misguided auto climbed the curb-

ing and tried to butt down the wall of a store building.

"Give it some climbin' irons!" yelled a newsboy.

The automobile, with its front wheels pressed against the wall, began to rear up like a great black bug, determined apparently to scale the perpendicular side of the building and enter through one of the open windows above.

As soon as he saw the motorman pitched into the gutter, Merriwell moved toward the carriage.

"Time to take a hand in this!" was his thought. "There will be more hurt, if I don't!"

He leaped to the step, but before he could mount to the high seat the auto was butting blindly against the wall.

"He's goin' ter shut off the juice!" squeaked the newsboy.

What the trouble had been with the levers Merry did not know. When he took hold of them, the hansom became manageable and obedient. He shut off the electricity, and the front wheels dropped down from the wall. The next moment he swung to the ground and opened the door.

To his surprise, the man who emerged from the carriage was Dunstan Kirk, the leader of the Yale ball team.

"Glad to see you!" gasped Kirk. "I couldn't get out, and I was expecting the thing to turn over! I believe I'm not hurt."

"The motorman is, though! He has been carried into the drug store."

Frank looked toward the drug store and saw an ambulance dash up to convey the injured man to the hospital.

"Glad you're all right!" turning again to the baseball captain. "These things are cranky at times. I've had some experience with one."

A policeman pushed forward to take possession of the automobile until the company could send another motorman.

The ambulance dashed away, and Browning, Diamond and Rattleton came across the street hurriedly from the apothecary's. Bink and Danny, Gamp and Dis-mal, were already crowding round Merriwell. Back of them was a pushing, excited throng.

"Which way did that carriage go?" Kirk demanded.

"Which carriage?"

"The one that was just ahead of us. I was chasing it in the automobile?"

"With a driver in a green livery and a bay horse?" asked the newsboy, who had pushed into the inner circle.

"Yes. Which way did it go?"

"Turned de first corner."

"Let's get a cab!" said Kirk. "Come, I want you to go with me!"

He caught Merriwell by the arm.

A cab had drawn up near the curbing, and toward this they moved, Merriwell reserving his questions until later.

Dunstan hurriedly gave instructions to the driver, and climbed in after Merriwell.

"Now, what does this mean?" Frank demanded, as the cab started with a lurch. "What sort of a wild-goose chase are you on?"

"What made that auto-carriage do that way?"

"There was something the matter with it, I suppose."

"It struck me that the motorman may have been in the pay of the fellow I was chasing."

He lowered his voice, even though the rattling of hoofs and wheels and the noises of the street rendered it wholly improbable that the driver or any one else could hear what was spoken inside.

"Frankly, Merriwell, the chap I was chasing looked like Morton Agnew! I was in Mason & Fettig's, five or six blocks above, when some one came into the other room and passed a counterfeit ten dollar bill on the proprietor. He discovered it while the fellow was going through the

door, and gave a call. I ran to the door and saw the rascal—not well, you know, but a side glance—not much more than a flash—and I thought he was Agnew. Of course, I couldn't swear to it. I may have been mistaken. But to satisfy myself, I jumped into that automobile and gave chase. He saw I was pursuing him and he sprang into a cab. I was determined to overhaul the scamp and satisfy myself on that one point. Perhaps I ought not to mention the name, as I am so uncertain, and I shall not mention it to any one else."

Dunstan Kirk, the athletic and capable captain of the baseball team, had come to admire and trust Frank Merriwell. He had seen enough to know that Frank could be trusted in any way and in any place.

"What do you think of it?" he asked.

"That there is no chance now of discovering whether your suspicions were true or false. Unless"—hesitatingly—"you should cause Agnew's arrest and have him taken before the man who was cheated. Or you might tell the man your suspicions and let him act in the matter."

"I am not certain enough!" said Kirk. "It's too bad he got away! The motorman couldn't have been in his pay?"

"If so, he has received his pay!" said Merry, meaningly. "He went out of that seat on his head and struck hard. I think the motorman simply found the hansom unmanageable, for some reason. Those carriages take freaks at times."

"And your opinion about Agnew?"

"He isn't too good to do such a thing, and I have had reason to believe lately that he is hard up. He used to hold himself up by his winnings at cards, but he has cheated so outrageously and boldly that the students fight pretty shy of him."

"We're just wasting our time, I'm afraid!" Kirk grumbled, as the cab rattled on down the street.

"Hold on!" said Merriwell, looking

through the window. "There is your green-liveried driver and your bay horse!"

Though the cab in question was standing by a curbing, Frank saw at a glance that the horse was sweaty and showed other signs of recent fast driving.

"Empty, and the bird has flown!" he observed, as the cab they were in stopped and they got out. "Whoever he was—Agnew or another man—he has had time to escape!"

CHAPTER II.

THE CAPTAIN'S REQUEST.

The green-liveried driver was questioned, but no information of value was obtained, and when it was seen that there was no chance of settling the question which had moved Dunstan Kirk to the pursuit, Kirk settled with the driver of the cab that had brought them thus far, and he and Merriwell went into the nearest restaurant.

"I understand you don't smoke, or I might be tempted to order cigars," he said, as a waiter came forward for their orders, after they had taken seats at a table in one of the small side rooms. "I wanted to have a talk with you about certain matters. Not about Agnew, but concerning Buck Badger!"

When the waiter had gone he continued:

"I am interested in Badger's pitching. The fellow has good pitching ability. But he is erratic. Sometimes he pitches wonderfully. Then the very next time he will fall away down. I am convinced that what he needs as much as anything else is the right kind of encouragement."

"I consider him one of the very best of the new men who have come up with pitching ambitions," said Merriwell. "I have noticed the things you say."

"You were kind enough some time ago to recommend him to my notice," Kirk

went on, as if feeling his way. "You would be glad to help him, perhaps."

"I shall be very glad to help him, if I can, and to serve you in any way, Kirk. But you know he doesn't like me very well. There must be a willingness on both sides, you see—just as it takes two to make a quarrel!"

"I haven't sounded him, but I fancy he would be willing. He isn't doing any good lately. You may have noticed that too?"

"Yes."

The waiter brought the things ordered and went away again.

"That Crested Foam affair is the cause, I fancy," Dunstan Kirk went on, breaking a cracker and helping himself to some cheese.

Frank Merriwell had thought the same, but he did not wish to say so.

"He hasn't acted right since then. And by right, I mean natural, you understand! I suppose it grinds him to know that such a fellow as Barney Lynn could drug and rob him in that way."

Merriwell flashed Dunstan Kirk a quick look. It was evident that the captain of the Yale baseball team did not know that Buck Badger was intoxicated when he was lured aboard the excursion steamer, Crested Foam.*

A similar imperfect knowledge of the true condition of affairs at that time had been noticed by Merriwell in the conversation of others. The newspapers in their notices of the burning of the steamer had given attention chiefly to Lynn, merely stating briefly that Badger had been drugged and robbed by the ex-boat-keeper.

"I shouldn't think it would be a pleasant reflection," Frank answered.

"Very humiliating to a man of Badger's character. And it has just taken the heart out of him. Until that time he was one

*See TIP TOP WEEKLY, No. 211, "Frank Merriwell's Reward; or, Buck Badger's Humiliation."

of the most promising of the new pitchers at Yale. I was expecting good things from him. Now he seems to be nothing but a blighted 'has-been!' "

Merry smiled.

"And of all the sad words of tongue or pen, The saddest are these: 'It might have been!' "

"Just so," assented Kirk. "It's too bad to see a capable fellow go to the bone pile! I don't like it. I talked with him and tried to encourage him, but it had no permanent effect. He braced up for a little while, and then slumped again."

"At heart, Badger is very proud!" Frank explained. "He wouldn't admit it perhaps even to himself. He craves popularity, too, though he affects not to care at all for the opinions of others. It has been his misfortune not to be popular. His disposition is against it. This has made him very sore at times, though he has tried to conceal the fact. Now you can see that to a man of his disposition the things that happened on the Crested Foam would be tremendously depressing."

The captain of the ball team would have seen even more clearly how depressing they were if he had known all that Merriwell knew.

"Somehow, he seems to me like a man who is under the impression that he has lost all of his friends," said Kirk. "He needs to be assured that such is not the case—that his friends and acquaintances have no desire to cut him. I think if that could be done he would come out of the Slough of Despond and be worth something. We may need him this summer; or a man who has his pitching ability ought to develop into something worth while."

Frank saw that Dunstan Kirk was edging toward some kind of a request.

"If there is anything I can do!" he invited.

"Well, as your picked nine is to play Abernathy's nine of Hartford, on the ball

grounds here next Saturday, I wondered if you would be willing to let Badger pitch. It is an unheard-of sort of request to make, I know, and it lays me under the suspicion of wanting to see you beaten by the Hartford fellows. But I hope you know me well enough to understand that such cannot be the case."

"Sure! I'd never thought of it, if you hadn't!"

"I've thought of asking this of you for a day or two. You see, if you, who are not particularly Badger's friend, show such a disposition to recognize and honor his pitching abilities, it ought to brace him up!"

Merriwell drummed thoughtfully on the table.

"Perhaps it can be done! If it will brace him up any and put him on his feet, I shall be glad to show Badger all the consideration I can."

"I was almost afraid to mention it," explained Kirk, "for I know that he has not felt just right toward you. But if you will?"

"I intended to pitch that game myself, for Abernathy's men are not the easiest things on the planet. Of course, if Badger falls down, I should be compelled to go into the box and do my best to save the day. And with a fellow like Badger, that might not work well. It would be just like him to think that I did it to humiliate him and show myself the better pitcher! You see the possibility?"

"Yes, I see it!"

There were other considerations, which Frank did not desire at the moment to mention.

"I'll have a talk with Badger and see what I can do!" Kirk went on. "When he was so wildly ambitious, a little while back, a word from me might have settled it; but I suppose I shall have to show him by argument that he ought to accept your friendly offer. You authorize me to make that as an offer?"

"Yes. I'm willing to try to help Badger. He has good stuff in him, and, as you say, it would be too bad for him to get into the dumps and neglect to develop it. I can arrange it, I think, and, if he will pitch for us Saturday, he may. With the clear understanding that I am at liberty without question to take the pitcher's box at any time I see fit!"

"Of course!"

The captain's face had brightened. He was not a partisan of Buck Badger nor of any man. He cared only for the recognition and development of the best Yale players and the triumph of the Yale nine. And because he recognized in Frank Merriwell these same unselfish qualities he had come to him with this request.

"I doubt much if Badger will accept the offer," said Frank.

"I shall take the offer to him, any way. I believe it will brighten him to receive it, even if he refuses it. That desire for popularity which you mentioned will, I think, make him accept. He may tell himself and all his friends that he doesn't care for your opinion, but he does, just the same! He can't help caring for the opinion of any man who is a gentleman. I shall approach him carefully!"

CHAPTER III.

HOW THE NEWS WAS RECEIVED.

"Huah!" grunted Browning, opening his eyes a trifle in surprise, "don't that jar you?"

"What will Bart say?" gasped Rattleton.

"Merry doesn't have to take his orders from Hodge!" snapped Diamond. "But, just the same, I think it's a fool sort of agreement!"

Merriwell was in his room talking to some of his friends of the request of the baseball captain.

"Hodge will be cot under the holler!" sputtered Rattleton.

"My dear Rattles, don't worry about Hodge!" Diamond begged.

"If you had only said to that captain, 'Get thee behind me, Satan!' " grumbled Dismal Jones. "But, of course, you could not resist such a temptation! When evil makes itself seem to us good, we're sure to give way. 'Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall!' "

Merriwell smiled. He liked to get the opinions of his friends, though usually he acted on his own.

"So you think it was a temptation instead of an opportunity?"

"What is a temptation?" chirped Bink Stubbs.

"Why, every time you grin at me that way I want to hit you in the mouth," explained Danny. "It's a temptation I can hardly resist!"

"Crush it!" yelled Bink, feinting with his fists. "If you don't, I'll have to!"

"Somebody throw those idiots out of the window!" growled Bruce, seeking solace in his pipe.

"Somebody give me a light for this cigarette first," begged Danny. "If I must fall I want help to alight!"

"Shouldn't think you'd need it!" Browning declared. "You have a light head. It would hold you up like a balloon!"

"Of course, if the captain wanted you to take on Badger and you've promised to do it, you'll have to go ahead. I'll band sty you—I mean I'll stand by you! I'll do my best to hold down third, no matter who is pitching."

Frank gave Rattleton a grateful look.

"You're always loyal, Harry!"

"Oh, I suppose that all of us will have to accept it and do the best we can," Diamond admitted, "but I don't like it, and that's flat. None of us has fallen in love with Buck Badger!"

"We'll be bub-bub-bub-beat worse than any old drum!" grunted Gamp.

"Everlastingly thumped!" wailed Danny.

"I don't know that I can get up enough interest to do much good on first," grumbled Bruce, who was as little pleased as any one.

"What's the use of going to the trouble of playing when you know at the start that you're to be defeated?"

"Look here, Bruce!" said Merry, firmly. "I don't want to hear you talk that way! We are not going to be beaten. We will wallop Abernathy's men, and don't you worry. We can do it all right!"

"Isn't that the crack team of Hartford?" demanded Diamond.

"Yes. Nothing better over there, I think."

"Then there will be no dead-easy business about it. They're not going to lie down and let us walk over them, just for the purpose of stiffening the spine of that Kansan!"

Jack Diamond was disgusted with the outlook.

"Have I said that they are easy?" Merry asked. "I only said I felt sure we could defeat them. And we can. Badger is a good pitcher. You know that. And if he loses his nerve, I shall very promptly take his place. There will be no monkeying. You are the fellows that seem to be in the notion of lying down."

"Oh, we'll play!" grunted Bruce. "We're just airing our little opinions. I expected to see you in the box Saturday, and I'm disappointed. I suppose that's all!"

He gave a tug at his pipe and rolled over lazily on the lounge, as if that settled it.

"Of course we'll play," agreed Diamond. "But I don't like to go into the game with Badger in the box. I don't like him. The fellow has made himself an insufferable nuisance. I don't agree with you that he is such a wonder. He's a very ordinary fellow, with a rich father

and a swelled head. Out West, where he came from, everybody got down on their knees to him, and here at Yale that sort of business don't go. Nobody cares whether his father is a cattleman or a cowpuncher. He wants to be worshipped, and Yale isn't in the worshipping business. Consequently, he's sore all the time!"

Jack forgot that, when he arrived at Yale a few years before, he expected homage on account of his family and pedigree.

"And I don't forget that he went aboard the Crested Foam blind drunk and made an ass of himself generally!" said Bruce, rousing again.

"That's one reason Merry wants to give him a show!" said Rattleton. "Badger has an idea that everybody who knows about it feels just as you do, and Frank wants to show him that they don't. See?"

"Oh, we'll play, of course!" Bruce grumbled, rolling back again.

"Sus-sure!" declared Gamp. "Whatever Mum-Merry says, gug-gug-gug-gug —"

"Are you trying to say goshfry?" Danny mildly asked, wetting the end of an unlighted cigarette.

"Gug-goes!" sputtered Gamp, giving Danny a kick that fairly lifted him from the floor. "You mum-mum-mum-measly runt, I'll kuk-kill you!"

"Because he's a joker, Danny thinks he is the only card in the pack!" said Dismal.

"If Merry says we can go into that game next Saturday with Badger in the box and earth the wipe—I mean wipe the earth with those fellows from Hartford, we can do it!" Rattleton declared, emphatically. "You know he wouldn't say such a thing if he wasn't sure of it."

"There are only two absolutely sure things, death and taxes," said Merriwell, soberly. "If I put too much emphasis on my belief, I'll have to withdraw it. I mean to say that I believe we can."

"And that's about the same as saying that we can!" Rattleton asserted.

"I'm only doubtful about Bart," said Dismal, like a prophet of evil.

"He will never catch for Badger!" Diamond declared.

"I think he will!" sputtered Rattleton. "He will see it just as we do, after Merry talks with him. Of course, we don't any of us love Badger, but what's the difference?"

"Let 'er go!" cried Bink, holding up his hands as if they gripped a bat. "Of course, we'll play ball!"

"Of course!" said Dismal. "We'll pitch Bart out of the camp if he makes a kick. The fellow that ba'ks on that, when he understands it, is 'fit for treason, stratagem and spoil!'"

CHAPTER IV.

HODGE'S ANGER.

Merriwell met Hodge on the campus, coming from the fence. He saw at once that Bart was "steaming."

"Look here, Merriwell," said Hodge, bristling with indignation. "It surely can't be true that you're going to put Badger into the pitcher's box next Saturday?"

Frank took him by the arm and turned with him away from the crowd.

"Yes," he answered, "I have promised to do that."

Hodge's face grew black with wrath.

"You've made a fool of yourself!" he roughly declared. "I wouldn't believe it. I said it was a lie, and I threatened to thump the face off of Donald Pike because he told it. Say, Merry, you don't really mean it?"

Frank had dropped Bart's arm, but they still walked on together. It was easy to see that he did not like Hodge's tone and manner.

"I must say you are outspoken and far from complimentary," he observed.

"I know I don't talk like this to you often."

"That's right. If you did, I'm afraid we might not be such good friends."

"But I must talk straight now, Merry!"

"I'm willing that you shall drive ahead, but I want you to hold in your temper. Don't let it run away with you."

"Great Scott! how can I hold in my temper under such provocation?"

"Simply by holding it in."

"But you know how I hate Badger? You know that we're bitter enemies! You know what I think of him!"

"I think I've heard you express some sentiments along that line."

"You know that he was drunk when he went aboard that excursion steamer! And he can't pitch!"

"You are wrong there!" Frank declared, positively. "He can pitch."

"Why, Merry, those Hartford fellows will just put it all over us. I tell you it won't do! You must give it up!"

"I suppose you know why I promised to let him pitch?"

"Well, I haven't heard, but I can guess. After you'd saved him from drowning himself and he came to realize what everything meant, he came licking round you, professing gratitude and friendship, and all that sort of stuff. And you——"

"See here, Hodge!" said Frank, with uncommon sternness. "I won't stand talk like that, and you ought to know it. I'm your friend, as I've proved many times, but I can't remain your friend if you treat me that way. I'm ready to hear your opinions, but I won't stand abuse from you or any other man!"

"I told you a good while ago that whenever you and Badger ceased to be enemies you would become friends!" Bart declared, somewhat softened. "And now it has come true. You are wanting to befriend and help him now, just as I knew you would. And after all the dirt he has

done you! Why, he's put dirt all over you a dozen times!"

The memory of it caused Bart to lose his head again.

"Badger is my enemy! A man who is his friend is no friend of mine! That is flat! I don't think I can make it plainer."

"You can't; it's plain enough. Badger is not my friend, but I am not his enemy."

"Don't tell me, Merriwell! You are his friend. You wouldn't ask such a thing, if you weren't. You must know that every one of the fellows will kick. What did you make such a fool promise for?"

Merriwell's face was flushed.

"You are making reckless talk, just because you are badly excited, old man! I am sure you will be sorry as soon as you cool off. If I didn't think so, I'd say some things that would be hot enough to take the skin off your face! Now, listen here! I have promised Dunstan Kirk to let Badger pitch next Saturday in that game against Hartford. Kirk thinks it will brace Badger up a little, and perhaps it will. I am willing to help Badger. He can pitch. We need good pitchers. Besides, I have given Kirk my promise. I mean to keep it."

Up to that moment, angry and unreasonable as he was, Bart had half believed that Merriwell might yet back out of his position and refuse to let Buck go into the box. He saw now how mistaken he had been.

"And you expect me to catch for that scoundrel?" he demanded, shaking with rage. "I tell you, Merriwell, I won't do it! I'll do any reasonable thing you want me to do, but I won't do that! I draw the line there, short and sharp! I won't play in a nine with Buck Badger!"

"Very well, then, we'll have to get along without you!"

"Do you mean it, Merry?" Hodge asked. "Do you mean that you will choose him before me?"

"Nothing of the kind, and you ought to know it. You would know it, if you were not just blind with anger and prejudice. I am not choosing Badger in preference to any of my friends?"

"Why aren't you?"

"Because I am not. There is no choosing of friends in this. I have said Badger shall pitch in that game. That does not make him my friend, and it ought not to drive any of my friends away. I am manager of the picked nine, and I supposed that my friends who had known me so long would be willing that I should have some privileges."

"But when I declare I won't catch!"

"You have no right to make any such declaration."

"Why haven't I?"

"Simply because, as my friend, you ought to be willing to aid me in this matter. I shall not put it on any other ground."

"I'll do anything for you, Merry, but that. I can't do that!"

"You mean you will not do it!"

"I won't do it!"

"Then I shall get another catcher!"

"Do you mean it?"

"I mean it!"

Hodge seemed stunned for a moment. Then his rage boiled over.

"All right, Merry!" he flashed. "If you want to favor a scoundrel like Badger instead of me, you can do it. But I will not catch in that game. I refuse to play on any nine with Badger! I——"

"I remember to have heard you say those things before!" said Frank, turning short about. "We will not discuss it any further, Bart. You are a free man. You may do as you please. I shall not argue the matter with you. Badger is going to pitch for me Saturday forenoon. Good-day!"

Hodge stopped and looked after him, all white and shaky, as Merry walked away.

Then the hot blood rushed in a tide into his dark face, and he, too, turned and walked off, filled with smothered exclamations and raging like a volcano.

CHAPTER V.

PIKE NAGS BADGER.

Donald Pike was in a nagging mood. He walked up and down the room a few times, finally stopping in front of his chum, Buck Badger. They had been talking about the Saturday ball game and both were in bad humor.

"I don't know what's the matter with you, Badger! I'm disgusted with you!"

The Westerner shifted his feet nervously, but said nothing.

"Perhaps you consider it an honor to receive that invitation from Merriwell? I don't! I am surprised that he sent it."

Badger shifted his feet again and shrugged his thick shoulders. His face was flushed and his eyes looked troubled.

"I am, too!"

"He had a motive, of course!"

Badger tossed a leg over the arm of his chair and looked out of the window.

"It has been his boast all along that he would have you in his flock by and by! You have always swore by all that's good and bad that you would never become a friend of his!"

"I'm not a friend of his!"

Pike laughed sneeringly.

"What do you call it? If I say a word against Frank Merriwell you want to eat me up. It's come to that! You were ready to fight him any minute, at first; now you're ready to lick the polish off his shoes just like the rest of those fellows."

"Nothing of the kind!" Badger hotly declared.

"Well, you're going to pitch for his picked team Saturday!"

"Kirk asked me to."

"And Merriwell sent him?"

"Yes!"

"And they have become such friends that they're almost chums. The fellows are beginning to say that Dunstan Kirk manages the Yale ball team and Frank Merriwell manages Dunstan Kirk. They are about right, I guess!"

"I allow that I'm no nearer being Merriwell's chum than I ever was. We could never be chums. But I'm not going to forget what he did for me on the Crested Foam. He saved my life, then, Pike!"

"And proposes to wind you round his fingers and drag you at his heels to make you pay for it!"

"So, when he sent me that invitation, and I talked it over with Kirk, I thought I ought to accept it."

"Don't you know that Hodge will refuse to catch?"

"Don't talk about him!" Badger hissed.

"He has already said that he will not catch for such a scoundrel as you!"

"Did he say that?"

"He says you will lose them the game; that it's an outrage to put you into the box, and he won't be a party to it. He says you can't pitch."

"Can't I? He says that, does he?"

"He says that if Frank Merriwell takes up with you, he will never speak to him again. Anyhow, what good will it do you to pitch for Merriwell? You'll be no nearer getting a show on the regular nine."

Badger shoved his hands deep into his pockets and showed his broad white teeth unpleasantly.

Pike was again walking up and down the room.

"I'd almost be willing to become a member of Merriwell's flock just to spite Bart Hodge. My hands just naturally go up and I want to fight whenever I see him. That's whatever!"

"Oh, you two will be as chummy as the Siamese twins in less than a month."

"Never! I hate him too badly."

"That's the way you were talking of

Merriwell a month ago. You will come round to it!"

"Not on your life! Hodge is a different sort of fellow from Merriwell, I allow."

"And you are going to accept that invitation?"

"I told you, Pike, that I have already accepted it. I'm not Merriwell's friend, and I despise Bart Hodge; but I'm not ungrateful. Whatever other things we learn out West, we learn to pay back favor for favor. I'd be a dirty coyote if I refused to accept that invitation after what Merriwell did for me. That's the way I look at it. I know that I can pitch ball. You know it, too. I can twirl a ball just as good as Frank Merriwell or any other fellow in Yale, and you know that, too. I reckon I'm able to ride my broncho alone, without Merriwell's help. I am not asking favors—none whatever! I'm simply returning a favor already given! You can see through that, can't you? If you can't, you're as chuckle-headed as a prairie dog!"

"I can see that you are becoming Frank Merriwell's friend just as fast as you can!"

"You're riding away off the line, Pike! I shall never be Merry's friend in the sense you think. But you know that he is the clean white article. He is straight goods. I've found that out. I used to think different, just as you do, but I've found out I was mistaken. He is a square man. And when he sent that invitation I knew there was no underhanded business about it whatever. That's the reason I accepted it; that and because it would have made me feel meaner than a Digger Indian if I had refused it. I'm going to pitch for him Saturday forenoon, and I'll win that game for him, too. Don't you let that fact escape your memory! I hope Bart Hodge will refuse to catch. I'm afraid I couldn't resist the temptation to throw the ball square at his head every time, if he was behind the bat. I want him to stay out!"

"Well, you're a fool!" Pike snapped, striding toward the door. "I never thought you'd do a thing like that. You are no more like the old Badger than a calf is like a mountain lion. You had some fire in you once, but you have become as soft as a ninny. The whole thing simply makes me sick."

Badger's face was red and his neck veins were swelling.

"I'm not used to any such talk whatever, Pike!" he exclaimed, as Pike hurled these sentences back at him from the doorway. "If you say anything like that again I'll kick you down stairs! I've taken more off of you to-night than I ever thought I could take from any one, and I won't stand it any longer!"

"Cool off, old man!" Pike sneered. "You're making a chuckle-headed prairie dog out of yourself, I think. If you should kick me you would kick the best friend you ever had. Good-by. See you later!"

The Westerner did not even grunt a reply, but sat still in his chair, with his hands in his pockets, his eyes glittering, his broad teeth showing, his neck veins protuberant and his face as red as a boiled lobster, while Pike walked away.

CHAPTER VI.

PIKE'S LITTLE PLAN.

When Pike came back to the room Badger was gone. Pike entered with his own key. He knew that the Westerner would likely be away a number of hours, calling on Winnie Lee. He glanced round the room, then went to the closet in which Badger's clothing hung.

Pike was crafty in his hate. He did not intend to lose his grip of the Kansan. He realized that he had gone almost too far. Badger would bear a good deal from him because of what they had been to each other, but to this there were limits. He felt that he had nearly reached the limit.

"He shall not pitch ball Saturday, if I

can help it!" he hissed, as he looked over the things in the closet. "If I can work it, it will make Hodge so hot against him that there will be a fight. And perhaps it will turn Merriwell and his precious flock against him, too. It's risky, but it is worth all the risk."

He took out a suit of Badger's clothes and laid it in a chair. Then he went to a desk and selected from it some "make-up" preparations which had been there ever since the production of the sophomore play, "A Mountain Vendetta."

Then, after locking the door, he arrayed himself in Badger's suit, and, standing before the mirror, applied the preparations to his face, forehead and eyebrows.

Pike had a good deal of artistic skill in such matters, and in a short time he had darkened his face, blackened his brows, and drawn certain lines and colors, that, together with the change produced by the clothing, made him resemble Badger in a remarkable manner. When he put on Badger's hat the alteration seemed complete.

"Of course, that wouldn't stand close inspection," he muttered. "But there will be no close inspection. I shall look out for that. Now for the voice!"

He bunched up his shoulders to give them a thick look, cleared his throat, and looking straight at himself in the glass, began to imitate Badger's tones and characteristics of speech, speaking so low, however, that there was no danger of being heard by any one who might chance to pass.

"I allow that I'm a Kansan from away beyond the Kaw, and I reckon I'm a diamond pure without the slightest flaw! Sure! A genuine prairie dog from the short grass country couldn't chatter more like a Westerner than that. That would fool Badger himself. That's whatever! Yes, I reckon! My dadey is a rancher and I allow that I am great; for my home is on the boundless plains of the wonder-

ful Sunflower State! If I should practice, I reckon I could become a poet!"

Satisfied with his make-up and his abilities to imitate Badger's tone and language, Donald Pike returned the unused articles to the drawer, put away the clothing he had removed, and then sneaked down into the campus, carrying under his coat a long, stout cord.

Keeping away from the electric lamps and other lights he slipped stealthily on until he reached the entrance which led to the rooms occupied by Merriwell and Hodge.

Diamond and Browning came down, talking in low tones of Merry and Bart, and from this talk, Pike, who had withdrawn into the shadows, learned that both Hodge and Frank were out in town somewhere. This suited Pike's plans, and when Diamond and Bruce disappeared, he crawled into the shadow of a column and watched the path along which Hodge and Merriwell would come on their return.

"They'll not come back together, sure, unless all the stories I've heard are lies; for they're not on speaking terms!" he reflected. "The only thing I fear is that Hodge may not care to come to his rooms at all."

The thought made him uneasy, and caused the vigil which followed to appear torturingly long.

"Ah! there he is!" he whispered at last.

Slipping across the path, he tied an end of the cord he had brought to a post, then retreated into the shadow and tied the other end about the column.

The youth he had seen came on at a brisk walk. Pike was sure it was Hodge. He almost ceased to breathe as the unsuspecting young fellow approached the cord. He put himself in position for a hasty spring.

Crash!

The youth tripped over the string and went down headlong, falling heavily.

"I reckon I've got you now!" Pike hissed in a low tone, imitating Badger's voice, and at the same time leaping toward the prostrate form.

Deceived by the darkness, Donald Pike had tripped Frank Merriwell, but he did not yet know it. With that imitation of the Westerner's speech, he knocked Merriwell down, as the latter tried to get up.

Again he struck, as Frank attempted to rise, but Merry dodged the blow, and, catching Pike by the legs, threw him. Before Pike could realize what had happened, Merriwell was on top, with his fingers at Pike's throat.

"You scoundrel!" Frank hissed. "I am tempted to give you what you deserve for that!"

But Pike was not ready to surrender, though he knew now that he had committed a woful blunder. In fact, the knowledge that he was dealing with Frank Merriwell aroused him to a fierce resistance. He felt that it would simply be ruinous to be held and recognized by Merriwell, and he began to fight like a demon to get away.

He freed his hands and struck Frank heavily in the face, at the same time kicking with all his might. He tried to thrust his thumbs into Frank's eyes.

"I'll kill you, if you don't let me go!" he snarled.

Frank had felt from the first that his assailant could not be Buck Badger; now he recognized the voice of Donald Pike, for Pike, in his fright and desperation, forgot to keep up the disguise.

Seeing that the only way to deal with Pike was to choke him into semi-insensibility, he caught and crushed down the flailing fists and arms and tightened his grip on Pike's throat.

Pike writhed and flounced, kicking and struggling, but all without avail. That vise-like grip grew tighter and tighter. The pain seemed unbearable. He gurgled and choked, and his lungs seemed to

be bursting. He could not breathe, and his brain began to reel.

"Give in?" Frank asked.

"Don't k-k-k-ill me!" Pike gasped, as the grip on his throat relaxed.

"You deserve it, you scoundrel!"

Frank took his knee from Pike's breast, removed the choking hand and flung Pike from him.

"Now get up!" he commanded. "Get up before I am tempted to kick you across the campus!"

Pike shuffled and evaded, as his breath came back.

"I thought you were Badger, and I was just playing a little joke on you!" he whined.

"Get up!" Frank exclaimed.

Pike struggled up, and Merriwell jerked him toward the nearest light. He saw the "make-up" and recognized the clothes as some he had seen on the Kansan.

"What were you up to?" he demanded, with threatening emphasis.

He saw forms moving in the campus, and he did not want to tarry with Pike.

"Just a little sport!" Pike whined.

He was completely crushed.

"You lie, Donald Pike! You had some object. I can almost guess what it was. You imitated Badger's voice and way of speaking, when you jumped on me. You are wearing Badger's clothing. That make-up is intended to lead anyone who sees you into thinking you were Buck Badger. You wanted to make me believe that Badger had assaulted me."

"Just a joke!" Pike pleaded. "Merry, I didn't mean anything, only to have a bit of sport. That is honest. I didn't know it was you."

"Ah! That last sounds as if you meant it. I hardly think you did know who you were tackling. I think I shall take you over to Badger's room and let him see you just as you are. Come along!"

Pike was not anxious to be seen by the

men who were crossing the campus, so he moved along, with Frank at his side.

Frank was thinking rapidly, in an effort to understand Pike's motives.

"I want to know why you leaped on me in that cowardly way and struck me when I was down. You wouldn't have served Badger that way! And if you wanted to have a little fun with Badger, you would not have disguised yourself and imitated his way of speaking. That story don't go with me, Pike!"

Pike was watching for a chance to escape, intending to make a dash for liberty at the first opportunity.

"You are disguised as Badger. Badger would not assault me that way, for Badger is a man! But you wanted to make some one think he had been assaulted by Badger. That one must be Bart Hodge!"

Pike started to run, but Frank caught him by the collar and jerked him back.

"Don't be in a hurry, Pike! I've seen you through and through for some time and understand your little game of this evening."

Donald Pike walked on for a time peaceably enough, but he was only watching for an opportunity to break away. Again he fancied the opportunity had come. But no sooner did he start than Frank tripped him and he fell sprawling.

Before he could get up, Frank's hand was on his collar.

He made another fierce struggle as soon as he was on his feet, only to discover that he was as helpless as a child in the hands of Frank Merriwell. He had never dreamed that Merry was possessed of such strength and skill.

The shadows were heavier at this point, and Merriwell kept a grip on Pike's collar.

"See here, Pike!" he exclaimed. "If you try anything of that kind again I shall simply knock you down. You are going with me, if I have to tie and drag

you. So you might as well come along quietly and save trouble."

"I shall have you arrested for this!" Pike blustered, now that whining and begging and fighting had failed.

"Do! I think your friends would enjoy hearing the story of your remarkable masquerade told in court. Proceed with the proceedings, Donald. But just now you are going with me, regardless of the after consequences."

Pike caught at a post, but Merry jerked him away from it, and then hurried him rapidly on in the direction of Badger's room.

Pike was sure Badger was not in, and began to think that he might save himself bruises and rough treatment by apparent acquiescence.

"I will go with you," he finally panted, "but under protest. And I shall make you sorry for this outrage. You have no right to treat me thus."

Merriwell did not answer, but kept a hand on Pike's collar while he conducted him up the stairs.

To Pike's consternation, Buck Badger was in the room and the door was open.

Before Pike could quite make up his mind to try again to escape, Merry had bundled him through the doorway.

Badger scrambled up.

"There is your friend!" said Merriwell, pointing a finger accusingly at Pike, who was too confused and humiliated to speak. "He disguised himself that way, and attacked me awhile ago near my room, thinking I was Bart Hodge. He has found out his mistake. He wanted to make Hodge think that you had done the dirty work, so that you and Hodge would lock horns the first time you met, and there would be trouble again all round the camp. He is a contemptible and cowardly puppy, and I feel that I have soiled my hands by touching him. But I wanted you to see him in that rig and to know him as he is."

A fierce denial was on the lips of Donald Pike, but he had not the courage to utter it. He saw that something more than denials would be necessary to explain matters.

The Westerner was as speechless as Pike, and Merriwell turned away.

"I reckon we'll have a little explanation of this, Pike!" were the words Merry heard as he reached the head of the stairs. They were spoken in an awesome tone of voice, and came from Badger's lips.

Then the door closed with a bang, and he knew that the Kansan had barred the way of Pike's escape from the room.

The next morning Frank received this note:

"Mr. Frank Merriwell: Pike and I had a settlement last night. He tried to lie out of the thing, but I made him confess to the whole truth. Then I kicked him down stairs. We are not rooming together any more whatever. BUCK BADGER."

CHAPTER VII.

AT THE HOME OF WINNIE LEE.

Frank Merriwell seemed the personification of spring as he approached the residence of Fairfax Lee, the next afternoon. Spring is the time when the wine of life flows warm through the veins of nature. Its face holds the bloom of youth and the smile of hope. Its heart is all aglow with the joy of living. The golden summer is before it; and it has no dead past, for the winter seems to belong to the year that has gone.

A handsomer specimen of young manhood could not have been found. The flowering spray in his buttonhole seemed part of the jaunty new suit which so became him. He was clean-looking and energetically wholesome. From the crown of his head to the soles of his feet he was nattily neat, yet he was as far from being dudish in appearance as it is possible for one to be. He looked to be what he was—strong and lithe-limbed, almost phys-

ically perfect, with a handsome, intelligent face, hopeful, courageous heart, and active brain.

Yet many things had come to trouble him in the past twenty-four hours, even though his bright face showed not a trace of their annoying effect. Chief of these things, of course, was the defection of Bart Hodge. Hodge had gone away stubbornly angry, and Merriwell had not seen him since the moment of parting.

Every member of the "flock" was hot against Hodge, and had not hesitated to speak plainly. Hodge's rebellious spirit had rallied them round Merriwell as one man. Browning and Diamond had even argued that he ought not to be longer recognized as a member of Merriwell's set. The only one who had ventured to stand up for him, aside from Merriwell himself, was Harry Rattleton. Frank had defended him to the last, insisting that allowances should be made for the peculiarities of Bart's disposition, and asserting that he would be found all right in the end.

Frank was thinking of all this as he drew near the home of Winnie Lee. His intention was to call on Inza and have a talk with her about the 'Varsity boat races at New London in June, for Inza was the "mascot" of the Yale crew that was to meet Harvard at New London. In addition, he expected to inform her and her friends of the arrangements made for the ball game with Hartford on Saturday.

He looked about him after he had tripped lightly up the steps and rang the bell. The Lee home was in a fashionable and exclusive part of New Haven, and the spacious grounds were beginning to take on beauty and color under the reviving influences of spring. A fountain, shot through with rainbow hues, was spraying a marble sprite, while a rheumatic gardener troweled round the rim of a loamy flower-bed.

Winnie, who had observed Merriwell's

approach, came to the door herself to admit him.

"Oh, you didn't come to see me?" she asked, when he inquired for Inza.

"That would be pleasant enough, but it wouldn't do to make Buck jealous!"

He laughed in his cheery way.

"I don't think it would be easy to make him jealous of you now," she answered.

"And I'm so glad he is to pitch for you Saturday! I want to thank you for that, myself. It was just like you to send such an invitation."

Merry's eyes dropped under her earnest look. He dared not tell her just then that the invitation had been procured by Dunstan Kirk.

"Who told you he is to pitch Saturday?"

"Why, he told me so this morning himself."

"And of course you have told Elsie and Inza?"

"Yes."

"Well, I want to see Inza and have a talk with her about the New London team. So I think I will take a car for Mr. Moran's."

Winnie had informed him that both Inza and Elsie had gone on an errand of mercy to the home of the grandmother of Barney Lynn.

"And you won't come in, even a little while? You prefer their society to mine, I see! I am ashamed of you, Frank Merriwell! You are not as gallant as you used to be."

Her voice was merry and her heart light.

"Some other afternoon or evening I shall be glad to come in and talk you to death. Just now I am pressed for time."

"I ought to have gone down there with them," she confessed. "But it seemed that I couldn't get away. Frank, you don't know what angels of mercy those girls have been! Elsie found out that Mrs. Moran was starving and dying by inches

for lack of proper food and medicines, and since then she and Inza have been down there every day, and often two or three times a day."

"I trust they don't venture after night-fall!"

Frank was thinking of the fight Jack Ready had while rescuing Elsie from the drunken ruffian, Jim Haskins.

Then he thanked Winnie for her invitation, said good-by, and hurried away to catch the first car going in the direction which he wished to take.

"I hope Badger is entirely worthy of her," he thought, his mind on Winnie Lee. "She is a fine girl, and if he gets her he will get a prize. Now, if they don't pass me, coming back in another car! Winnie hasn't the least idea that Buck was intoxicated when he went aboard the Crested Foam, and she shall never know it from me!"

CHAPTER VIII.

INZA AND ELSIE.

Neither of the girls heard Merriwell's gentle rap on Mrs. Moran's door, and he pushed into the house without further ceremony, feeling sure that they were busy in caring for the old lady or that her condition was such that they could not leave her.

Then, looking through the doorway at the right of the corridor, his gaze fell on a pleasant sight.

The girls were seated by the bed, Elsie holding one of Mrs. Moran's wasted hands in her own warm palms, while Inza was reading to the old woman from a little copy of the New Testament.

Merriwell stopped for a moment, for his entrance had been unnoticed. Somehow, the pathos of the scene inexpressibly touched him.

"They are angels of mercy, just as Winnie said!" was his thought.

Inza had an excellent reading voice, as

pure and liquid as falling water. It was a pleasure to listen to it. Frank had often heard her read, but it seemed to him never with such expression as at that moment. The sunlight, falling through the small west window, illuminated her face, making it almost radiant, and touched with brighter tints Elsie's crown of golden hair.

"I wish I were a painter!" he thought. "I should like to preserve that scene. If I could have that to hang in my room, it would be like a flash of sunshine to look at. But no painter could do it justice. There are certain things that can't be painted, and this is one of them."

He noisily shifted his feet to call attention to his presence, and Inza looked up.

The color flooded her cheeks and her dark eyes showed surprise.

"Why, Frank!" she gasped. "How did you come to be here?"

Elsie also started up.

"How did you get in?" she asked.

"Opened the door and walked in. You were so busy you didn't hear my knock, so I just took the liberty."

Mrs. Moran stirred, and turning feebly, looked at him, her eyes showing recognition.

"I am very glad to see you!" she whispered, as he advanced toward the bed and she stretched out one of the feeble hands.

"Sometimes I think that I am not long for this world. I should have died here, I feel sure, if it had not been for these girls. And your other friend, Miss Winnie, has been very good, too! I hope you are quite well, Mr. Merriwell!"

"Quite well! Don't let me disturb you. Inza was reading to you. Let her go on. I will sit here in this chair."

Then Inza read again, until the old woman was tired; after which the trio left the house, and walked down to the car line, where they took a car for the residence of the Hon. Fairfax Lee.

"I went to Lee's to see you," Frank

explained, "for I wanted to talk over some details of the trip to New London and the June races. The Mascot of the Crew hasn't been down to the boat-house this week. And I wanted to invite both of you, and Winnie, to the ball game Saturday forenoon."

"I am sorry about Bart!" Inza exclaimed. "But he will come round all right, don't you think?"

"He may not play in this game, but he will see how foolish he is, and be heartily ashamed of it by and by."

"Who is to catch for you, then?"

"Jack Ready!"

"What?"

"Perhaps you haven't seen Ready catch? He is a good one!"

"You need a strong battery, Frank!" Elsie asserted.

"Yes, like you and Hodge," nodded Inza. "I'm afraid Badger and Ready will not be able to work well together. They haven't played together before, I believe?"

Inza was full of bright, snappy conversation, as they sped homeward in the car with Merriwell. But Elsie was unusually silent.

"She can't get Mrs. Moran out of her mind," Frank thought.

He left them at the door, for the hour had grown so late that he felt he could not just then spare the time to go into the house, much as he wanted to do so.

Inza and Elsie went up stairs together. Winnie was out or in another part of the house.

Inza shrugged her shapely shoulders.

"What is the matter, Elsie, dear?"

Elsie's lips were quivering as she faced round and confronted her friend.

"You ought to know what is the matter, Inza Burrage!" she declared.

"I'm not the Seventh Daughter of a Seventh Daughter," said Inza, a bit defiantly. "How should I know?"

"You do know!"

"I should say that you are showing a bit of jealousy, if pressed for an answer."

"And haven't I a right to be jealous, Inza?" Elsie demanded.

"Haven't I a right to talk to Frank Merriwell and be nice to him, if I want to?"

"Of course, Inza, but—well—you know —"

"It seems to me, Elsie, that you came between Frank and me once! Isn't it so? Frank cared for me before he ever did for you. You came between us. I haven't come between you and Frank yet, but if I should do so would it be any worse than what you did?"

"Oh, I thought that was past!" cried Elsie, flushing and trembling. "You never understood me, Inza!"

"And do you fancy for a moment that you understand me?"

"Perhaps not; but I can see—I'm not blind!"

"Oh, yes, jealous people can see things that no one else can," laughed Inza, with a provoking toss of her proud head.

"Do you want to make me hate you forever, Inza Burrage?" Elsie cried. "You hurt me! You are heartless!"

A sudden look of deep pain shone in Inza's face, changing her manner in a twinkling, and she turned away as if trying to conceal it.

"Of course, nothing ever hurts me!" she said, bitterly. "I am steel and iron and all that! Your heart is tender, and such things hurt you!"

Elsie did not know what to say. She had tried to feel for a time that Inza had ceased to care for Frank, and then had told herself that Inza had no longer any right to care for him. She was beginning to realize that questions of right and wrong cut very little figure in affairs of the heart—that, in fact, love obeys no such laws.

When Inza turned back, her face had lost its trace of pain.

"Elsie," she said, "we will not quarrel about Frank, for Frank's sake. It would distress him if he knew it. He must never know it. Promise me that you will not say a word to him about it."

"Of course I won't say anything about it," Elsie agreed. "I should fear to, and I shouldn't want to."

"Then we'll keep it to ourselves. You have discovered that I haven't ceased to care for Frank Merriwell. Perhaps I never shall. But that is neither here nor there."

The old wave of jealousy swept across the tortured soul of Elsie Bellwood.

"Do you mean that you intend to win him if you can, after you have told me that you surrendered all claim on him?"

"I haven't said anything of the kind. But I claim the right and privilege of talking to him and with him as much as I please. You and he are not engaged, even if he has seemed to prefer you. He may change his mind, just as he did before, but remember that I'm not trying to get him to!"

"Then you do intend to try to win him?"

"My dear, you must recognize the fact that Frank is the one to do the winning. I shall never run after any man."

Elsie's blue eyes flashed.

"Do you mean to insinuate that I would?"

"I thought we weren't going to quarrel!"

The look of pain came back into the dark, handsome face, and this time Elsie saw it. A feeling of remorse began to tug at her heart.

"I am not worthy of Frank Merriwell," she said, softly. "I know that. But I thought——"

"You thought nothing could hurt me!"

"No, not that. I thought he was to be mine, and recently that hope has been slipping through my fingers. I can't tell you, Inza, how I have felt."

"I can understand!" said the dark-

haired girl. "I have good cause to understand!"

"I know that really you are more worthy of him, Inza, than I am. I have always thought that, when I wasn't crazy with the fear that you might win him away from me. But I just can't surrender my claim, slender as you think it!"

"For Frank's sake," repeated Inza, "we will not quarrel about him! As for these other questions——"

Winnie's light step was heard in the hall, and the sentence died unfinished.

CHAPTER IX.

HODGE'S REPENTANCE.

Bart Hodge absented himself from class and lecture, but later that night, after all the members of the "flock" had departed from Merriwell's room, Bart came in. His face was flushed and feverish.

"I don't care what the other fellows think, Merry!" he said, dropping into a chair as if he felt that he had no right there. "But I do care what you think! I went away in a huff, saying to myself that I'd never come back until you sent for me, when I knew that you wouldn't send for me and that I would come back. And here I am."

"How could I have sent for you, Bart?" Merry questioned. "I knew you would feel differently when you had time to think it all over, and I told the fellows so."

"I don't care for their opinions!" Bart snarled. "I'd never come back for any of them!"

"They are my friends!"

"I've been miserable ever since. I have felt like a cur as I've sneaked round town. You needn't try to stop me! You are the truest friend I ever had, and I've treated you like a dog. I know it, and I'm sorry for it."

"I am your friend, Bart, because I understand you and appreciate you. The

others would think as much of you as I do, if they understood you as well. We'll not talk any more about this matter, if you're willing, but just turn in for the night and say nothing about it."

"How can you overlook a thing like that?" Hodge asked.

"Because I knew all the time that your better nature condemned what you did, and that you would by and by yield to your better nature. The man who meets a powerful temptation and finally masters it is stronger really than one who never is tempted. I forgave you long ago, Bart, and would have told you so if you had come back. I was angry at the time, but I didn't remain angry."

"I've come back to tell you that I'll catch for you to-morrow—Saturday. I swore I'd never catch for Buck Badger, but I will. I'll catch for the Old Boy himself, if you want me to. I'm not ready to agree that he ought to be permitted to pitch, for I hate the very sight of him; but I have put that by, and will catch for you. It will be catching for you, you see, Merry, and not for him. I ought to have looked at it that way before, but I could not."

"I have got Jack Ready for catcher!"

Bart gasped, while his dark face seemed to get redder and hotter.

"Why, he can't catch!"

"Much better than you think. He is a pretty fair catcher."

"And if he falls down?"

"I'll put some one else in. I have two or three in mind, and have spoken to two of them."

Hodge seemed stunned.

"I'm willing to catch!" he said.

"You may, Bart, if I see that Ready can't do the work. If the game seems about to be lost I'll go into the pitcher's box and you behind the bat, and we'll pull the nine out of the hole! Eh?"

Hodge's eyes brightened strangely.

"We can do it, Merry! I'll be as steady

as a clock. Only I'm sorry things went the way they did and that I showed how mean I can be. I only proved what my enemies say of me. It's too late now, but I'm ready to do what I can to make it right."

Merriwell came over and put a hand on Bart's shoulder.

"I understand you, Bart, and few do. I know that your friendship for me is true blue, and that your heart is where it should be, even if your head runs away with you. Now we'll get to bed. To-morrow we play ball, and I want to be in condition."

But Bart Hodge was not in condition to play ball, nor in condition for anything the next day. When morning came he had a high fever, and the doctor whom Merriwell summoned looked grave.

"He has lost sleep and been exposing himself and has caught cold," he said. "It looks like a case of pneumonia. Better send him to the hospital."

"Will he be better off at the hospital than here, if there is some one here to take care of him?"

"No, I don't know that he will. And I was going to say that it is really too bad to move him in his condition."

"Then he will stay right here. I'll get the best nurse to be had, and look after him all I can myself!"

And Hodge, under the best of care, remained in his room, while Merriwell's nine, with Jack Ready as catcher and Badger as pitcher, went out to meet the team from Hartford that forenoon.

CHAPTER X.

FRANK MERRIWELL'S HANDICAP.

A big crowd of rooters had come over from Hartford to whoop things up for Abernathy's men. They were enthusiastic fellows, and they made a great deal of noise. Some of them were betting men, and they flourished their money with as

much confidence as if the game were already won and they were certain of raking in their winnings.

But Yale had turned out a big crowd, too, for Merriwell was immensely popular, and, of course, the Yale and New Haven crowd would naturally be the larger on the home grounds.

"We'll have a warm time this forenoon!" Frank observed to Jack Ready.

"Torrid as the equator!" Ready answered.

"How is your nerve, old man?"

Ready dropped a finger to his pulse and seemed to be counting.

"Steady as a clock, Merry!"

"Keep it that way. There is Badger coming over for a talk with you. We'll begin as soon as we get a little warming up."

He looked at his watch and began to talk with Browning, while Ready and Badger drew aside to confer.

Merriwell could see that Badger was a bit nervous when the game was called. There was a flush in his face and a glitter in his eyes that told of excitement, but this seemed to disappear as he took the clean new Spalding ball in his hands and entered the box.

In the grand stand Frank saw Inza, Elsie and Winnie, and he lifted his hat to them again, though he had enjoyed a long talk with them not many minutes before. Winnie was smilingly happy. She waved her handkerchief to Badger, and the Kansan's white teeth showed in a grim smile of determination.

"If only you and Bodge were the battery—I mean if only you and Hodge were the battery!" Rattleton groaned in Frank's ear.

"Don't worry, Rattles! Just do your duty on third!" Merry answered. "We are all right!"

Thus encouraged, Harry went away happy and confident.

Browning was on first, with Diamond

on second. Danny Griswold was short stop; while Dismal had the right field, Bink Stubbs center, and Joe Gamp the left. The game opened with Merriwell's men in the field.

The Westerner surveyed the ground and his surroundings carefully. Then planted his toe on the rubber plate and shot in a "twister." It curved inward as it neared the batter and cut the heart of the plate. The batter had been fooled and did not swing at it.

"One strike!" called the umpire.

The batter, who was looking for an out-curve next, swung at it, and fanned the air.

The Yale men, and especially the sophomores, began to shout.

Badger thought it time to change to an out-curve, and sent one in hot as a Mauser bullet. But the batter was looking for out-curves. He reached for it. Crack!—away it sailed into the right field.

"Go, long legs!" was screamed at Dismal Jones, who sprinted for it with all his might.

The next man of the Hartfords at the bat was the pitcher, Pink Wilson, a fellow almost as tall and lank as Dismal Jones, with a hatchet face and a corkscrew nose. His admirers said he got that twisted nose from watching his own curves in delivering. He came up confident, thinking he understood the tricks of the Kansan pretty well, and that he would be easy.

But almost before he knew it the umpire called "one strike."

"That ball must have passed this side of the plat," he declared. "It was an in, and I had to jump to get out of the way."

"Don't jump at shadows!" shouted a Yale sophomore. "That ball was all right."

The umpire promptly informed Wilson that he was talking too much with his mouth.

"I'll get him the next time!" thought the lank pitcher of the Hartfords. "He

fooled me that time, but he can't do it again!"

But Badger did it again.

Again the sophomores began to yell. Jack Ready tossed the ball back.

Badger began to look and to feel confident, a thing that Merriwell, who was closely watching him, did not like. This time the Westerner, after almost bending himself double, gave his arm an eccentric movement and shot in another curve. Wilson struck at it desperately, and fanned out.

"He can't keep it up!" yelled a Hartford man, who had been wildly hunting for bets a short time before, and who felt the need of whistling to keep his courage up.

Barrows, the centre fielder, came to the bat next. He went after the very first one and got it.

Crack! and away the ball flew again into the right field, while the Hartford lads opened up with great vigor.

It was a hit, for everybody saw that Dismal, even though he was doing his best, could not possibly get it. Barrows raced to first, while Tillinghast, the base runner, took second, without trouble, but stumbled and fell, so that it was impossible for him to make another bag on the hit.

Badger next tried his highest speed, and the batter fanned, but Ready dropped and fumbled the ball, being unable to hold it, and came very near letting both runners advance, although he did get the sphere down to third in time to drive them back.

Watching closely, Frank had discovered that something about Badger's delivery bothered Ready.

Badger himself saw this, and he tried a change of pace, but the batter caught it on the handle of his "wagon-tongue," and drove out a "scratch hit" that filled the bases.

Oleson, a Swede, almost as large as Browning, came up to the plate.

"And there were giants in those days," droned Jones, from his position in the field.

"How's that for the yiant?" cried Oleson, as he slashed yet another down into Dismal's territory, bringing in the first score and causing the Hartford rooters to "open up."

Jones made a beautiful throw home, which sent Burrows scrambling back to third, which he reached barely in time to save himself, for Ready had lined it down to that bag in short order.

Frank was beginning to wonder if all the Hartford men were right field hitters, or was there something in Badger's pitching that caused them to put the balls into that field? Unable to keep still, he walked down toward first, and Browning found an opportunity to say:

"We ought to have Hodge behind the bat. Badger can't use his speed, for Ready can't hold him. Are you going to let those fellows lose this game in the first inning, Merriwell? If you do, I'll kick myself for a week for being chump enough to get out here and swear for nothing."

"It's a handicap not to have Hodge," admitted Frank.

Browning felt like saying it was a handicap not to have Frank in the box, but, fancying he had said enough in that line, he kept still.

Badger's face took on a hard look. He motioned for Ready to come down and advanced to meet him. A few words passed between them, while the Hartford "fans" geyed them.

This little talk seemed to bear good fruit, for the Westerner fooled the next batter with two drops, getting two strikes called. Then he tried "coaxers" till three balls were called on him, and again, with every runner taking all the "lead" he dared, the excitement was at a high pitch.

Frank feared for the result.

"Oh, for Hodge!" he thought. "I see now that our handicap means disaster unless the wind changes."

Ready was crouching under the bat, nervous but determined. Badger took his time, but put terrible speed into the next ball, which he sent over the inner corner of the plate. The batter struck at it, but missed clean.

Plunk! the ball struck in Ready's hand. Thud! it dropped to the ground. But the bases were filled and the batter was out, for all that Jack had not held the ball. He recovered it so that there was no possibility for the man on third to get home.

Now two men were out, but the bags were filled, and a long, safe hit meant more scores for the visitors.

Fleetwood, the Hartford third baseman, took his turn at the stick. He was a good waiter, and he found just what he wanted, sending it safe over the shortstop, so that two more scores came in.

Badger was pale round the mouth when the next hitter stepped up to the plate. He did not spare Ready. Jack missed the first two balls, being unable to hold them, although he did not let them get past him. Both were strikes, and again Badger tried to "work" the batter, though he did not slacken his speed. Frank was anxious, for he expected to see the freshman catcher let one of those hot ones pass him. Nothing of the kind happened, and, after trying two balls, Buck used a sharp rise and struck the man out.

The college men on the bleachers rose up and howled, but Frank Merriwell was gloomy at heart, though his lips smiled.

"Badger is doing well," he told himself; "but Ready cannot hold him. I'm afraid the handicap is too great. Oh, for Bart Hodge just now!"

The first half of the first inning was over, but Hartford had made three runs.

CHAPTER XI.

READY STEADY.

Merriwell saw that Ready could not catch for Buck Badger. There was such an utter absence of anything like team work that there seemed to be little hope that the game could be won by Merriwell's nine if the battery was not changed. Badger could pitch like a wonder at times, but he rattled Ready, who, as a rule, and in regard to other matters, was as steady as a clock. Ready simply could not do himself justice with Badger in the box. He felt it as well as Merriwell, but he doggedly continued, determined at all events to do his best. Ready was a fellow of infinite pluck, and usually a fellow of infinite confidence. He would have had confidence now, but there was not a thing to build his confidence on.

Merriwell's nine scored four times before it was forced again into the field. Frank sent Badger into the box again, after talking with him awhile.

"You rattle Ready, some way!" Frank told him. "Throw those in-curves more, and work in your dropped balls when you can. They get your out-curves."

Then, before playing began, he had a few words with Ready.

The first man at the bat got a hit, while the next man took first on balls. The next man at the bat knocked a fly into the hands of Danny Griswold, who was playing short stop, and the base runners came back to their places.

Then the men on bases tried to make a double steal, which was partially successful. The fellow on second reached third, but the runner behind him was cut off at second by a throw from Ready. Jack should have thrown to third, but he did not. He threw low to second, and Diamond got it on the bound, touching the runner as that individual was making a desperate slide.

Two men were out, and Frank hoped

that Badger would keep the visitors from scoring. Buck might have done so, but somehow he "crossed signals" with Jack, the result being a passed ball that let in a score.

"I'm hot stuff," chirped Ready, as he found Frank back at the bench of the home team. "When I don't fail, I succeed."

"I see you do," answered Frank, dryly. "You succeeded in letting in that run."

"Our wires got crossed. Badger gave me an in when I was looking for an out. If you'll put in a pitcher who can't throw a curve, I'll surprise you."

"Does Badger rattle you?"

"Refuse me! I think I rattle him."

There was no time for further talk, and the game went on. Buck was nervous, and Frank pitied him, for he could see that the Westerner might do well with a good catcher behind the bat. Just then Merry did not know of a man to put in Ready's place, for he could see that the Westerner's great speed and queer delivery might be too much for any green catcher who was not used to him.

"Yes," muttered Frank, "the loss of Hodge is the handicap that will cause us to lose the game—if we lose it."

The next man got first on balls, and then the following batter lifted a high foul. Ready got under it, and the Hartfords were retired at last.

"We're done up, Merry," said Rattleton, as the men came in.

"Not yet, old man," declared Frank, cheerfully. "I think I'll go behind the bat myself next inning."

"Don't do it!" exclaimed Harry. "I know you can play any old position, Merry, but your place is in the box. With you there, every man on the team will play like a streak. Won't you go in?"

"Badger——"

"Can see that he is bound to lose the game if this keeps on. He's got sense

He won't want to make such a bad record for himself."

"Ready will not be able to judge the double-shoot. I can't use that."

"You won't have to. You can win this game without it."

"I don't know."

"I do! Try it."

Frank was in doubt, and he permitted Badger to pitch one more inning. The Westerner worked hard, but it was plain he had lost confidence, and he was not at his best. Great beads of perspiration stood out on his face.

Two men scored, despite him, and the visitors had the lead again.

"I believe I'll try it in the box," Frank mentally decided. "Perhaps I may hold Ready steady. It looks like the only show to win out."

When Merriwell finally went into the box, seeing that it must be done, Badger retired with as good grace as he could, though his dark face was flushed.

"There would be no trouble if it wasn't for Jack Ready!" he asserted. "I can pitch all right, but the pitcher isn't the whole battery!"

"Your delivery bothers him," Merry explained. "I believe that you two together are capable of good work, but it will take a lot more practice, and just now we haven't time for practice. You can pitch, Badger, and your best is excellent; but you are irregular. But you'll come round all right. I was talking with Dan tan Kirk about you awhile ago, and he agrees with me. He has been closely watching you all through the game."

"I know it," Badger growled. "I've known it only too well! It has helped to make my pitching wild at times. If he had stayed away, I think I could have done all right all the time. But you'll find that Ready will worry you. He'd worry anybody. The fellow simply can't catch."

"But he can!" Merry insisted. "We'll win this game yet!"

The change that came over Jack Ready's work shortly after Merriwell went into the pitcher's box was little short of marvelous. Frank seemed to know how to favor Ready's weak points. And this kept Ready's head steady for other work, so that he made not another wild throw to bases.

Merriwell's nine began to feel their courage rise. It put life into them just to see Frank in the box. Stolen bases on the part of the Hartfords stopped. The swiftness with which Merry struck out three batters made the spectators gasp.

From that on Ready was steady, and he and Frank worked together like a battery team of long experience.

And Frank Merriwell won, in spite of his handicap!

CHAPTER XII.

THE HEROISM OF ELSIE.

The Yale rooters, and especially Merriwell's friends and admirers, who were a host in themselves, were roaring wild as they returned from the ball ground.

Merriwell joined Inza and Elsie, while Badger took a car with Winnie.

"I knew that everything was all right, as soon as you went into the box!" Inza declared. "But up to that minute I was nervous. I was wanting to shake you all the time for not taking Badger's place sooner."

"I felt sorry for Badger," said Elsie. "And I felt sorry for Winnie. She got as red as a beet when Badger left the box, but I know she didn't blame you, Frank. She saw just how it was, and she knew you ought to have gone in sooner, but of course she felt it."

"I was afraid Ready might begin to doubt his own abilities—though probably there is not any danger that he will ever do that! He was just what I expected at

him, though, when I pitched. And if Badger and Bart were friends and could, or would, work together, they would make a good battery."

"You will have to coach Badger some," Inza suggested.

"Yes. The captain of the ball team wants me to. He thinks there is good stuff in both of them, if it can only be properly developed."

The three got out at a transfer station and waited for another car.

"Dere she comes!" yelled an excited youngster.

The "she" he referred to was not the expected car, but the head of a circus procession, which was parading the principal streets as an advertisement of the performances to be given in the big tents in the suburbs that afternoon and night.

Merry and the girls looked in the direction indicated. The crowd at the corner seemed to become thicker. People began to swarm out of the doorways and stream out into the middle of the street.

"And this is scholarly New Haven!" exclaimed Inza. "Wild over a circus parade!"

"We're not in the scholarly part of New Haven!" laughed Frank. "I confess that I like to see a circus parade myself!"

Inza showed evidences that she liked the same thing, for she craned her handsome neck and stood on tip-toe to catch the first glimpse.

The nodding plumes on the heads of the horses drawing the gilded band wagon came into view, and at the same moment the band began to crash forth its resonant music.

Children danced and capered, heads were popped out of second story windows, and the pushing crowd grew denser.

The band wagon came slowly down the street in the bright spring sunshine, followed by the performers, mounted on well-groomed horses, some of which were beautifully mottled. There were other

horses, many of them—a few drawing chariots, driven by Amazons. Then came the funny clown, in his little cart, with his jokes and grimaces for the children.

There was another band wagon, as gorgeous as the first, at the head of the procession of wild-beast cages. Its music was more deafening than that of the other.

The street cars seemed to have stopped running, owing to the packed crowds, and Frank and his girl friends remained on the corner curiously watching the scene.

Suddenly a fractious horse jerked away from the man who had been standing at its head holding it, and whirling short about, half overturned the wagon to which it was hitched and raced wildly down the street.

People scattered in every direction, several being knocked down in the stampeding rush.

The horse climbed to the sidewalk, with wheels bumping the curbing, trying to get out of the way of some men who were seeking to stop it.

Almost before they were aware of it, horse and wagon seemed fairly on top of Merriwell and the girls. Elsie gave a startled cry and dashed across the street, where the people were falling back out of the way, with women pulling nervously and excitedly at their children.

A child fell headlong, and the horse seemed about to stamp it, when Frank, with a quick leap, picked it up from under the very feet of the runaway, and dropped it in safety at its mother's side. Then a tremendous roar ascended. Turning, Frank saw that Inza and Elsie had disappeared. He did not at first know the cause of the roar.

The horse, veering again and wheeling sharply, had hurled the wagon against a cage in which was confined a full-grown tiger. This was an open cage—that is, the screening, wooden, outer shell had been removed, showing the big beast of the

jungle, with its keeper in circus costume, seated in the centre of the cage on a low stool.

Against the door of this cage the bounding wagon had struck heavily—so heavily that the lock was torn away or broken, and the cage door pulled open.

The roar that went up was a roar of alarm and fright. And it increased in intensity when the striped beast, with nervously flicking tail, leaped past its keeper and into the street, where it crouched, not knowing what to do with its newly-found freedom.

The street was in the wildest tumult. The horses drawing the cage had been brought to a stop by the driver. But another horse, frightened by the din and the runaway, broke loose just at that time, and came tearing along, with flaming eyes and distended nostrils, like a Malay running amuck.

Frank sprang toward the head of this horse, for the peril to the stampeding people seemed great. But the animal veered and passed by, dragging Merry a few yards by the shafts and hurling him to the ground.

The sight he beheld as he scrambled up was enough to stop the beating of his heart.

Inza and Elsie had tried to again cross the street. Inza had been knocked down by the horse and lay unconscious, while Elsie had been swept on in the crowd.

More than that, the keeper of the tiger, who had courageously leaped after the terrible beast with his spear-like iron goad, hoping to be able to prod and cow it into subjection, had been knocked flat also by the horse, his iron goad flying out of his hand and into the street.

Though Frank was some distance away, he started toward the tiger, which had crouched and seemed about to spring on Inza. But before he could take a step, he saw Elsie run from the crowd toward Inza and the tiger.

Her face was very white, but it was filled with the look of high courage which inspired her. She realized the peril of any attempt she could make to save Inza, and she boldly took the risk.

A hundred voices were screaming at the big brute, which crouched with undulating tail and open jaws; but not another person seemed to be moving toward Elsie to render her assistance, with the exception of Frank Merriwell.

He saw the girl pick up the iron goad. Then Elsie Bellwood leaped between the tiger and Inza. As she did so she lifted the goad. The tiger turned its attention from Inza to Elsie, and the latter struck at it, as if the goad were a spear.

Frank Merriwell heard the click of a revolver at his side. He saw a man shakily lifting it.

"Permit me!" he gasped, and plucked it from the man's hand.

The revolver went up, flashing for a moment in the sunshine. A quick, sharp report rang out. The bullet, sent with true and steady aim, by the hand of Frank Merriwell, ploughed through the tiger's brain, and the beast flattened out convulsively and began to kick and writhe in its death agonies.

Hearing the report and seeing it fall, Elsie's uplifted hand fell, she swayed like a wind-blown vine, and dropped heavily down across the form of Inza Burrage.

CHAPTER XIII

FRIENDS.

The crack of the revolver and the fall of the tiger seemed to break the spell that had held and made cowards of the throng. A dozen men leaped toward the girls. But Merriwell reached them first.

He lifted Elsie, who had merely fallen in a faint, as he saw; and, passing her to a student whom he recognized, he bent anxiously over Inza.

There was a bruise and a fleck of blood on the upper part of her face.

"Inza!" he said, lifting her tenderly and seeking to arouse her. "Are you much hurt, Inza!"

The words and tone seemed to call her back from the land of death. She moaned feebly and tried to put up a hand.

Half lifting her in his arms, he looked around.

"Is there a surgeon here!" he called.

Elsie came back to consciousness with a shiver, and heard him call. Her face had been very white, but it became pale as death. The sight of Inza's bruised face and limp form upheld by Merriwell seemed to blur her brain again. She caught at the arm of the student who was holding her, and by a great effort kept her senses.

"Is she dead, Frank?" she whispered.

"No!" he answered. "I don't know how much she may be hurt though."

The tiger had ceased to struggle, the crowds were writhing, a babel of sound that was confused and confusing filled the air. The circus procession had come to a halt, with the exception of the forward band, which was blaring away far down the street.

A doctor came out of the crowd. Other doctors proffered their services, for Inza was not the only one who had been knocked over by the rush of the horses. The injured tiger-keeper was picked up and bundled into an ambulance.

"Right across here!" said the doctor who had answered Merry's call.

Then he led the way into an apothecary's.

"Nothing serious!" he announced, a minute later, when he had made his examination. "The young lady will be all right in a day or two."

He spoke of Inza, and both Merry and Elsie sent up fervent sighs of relief.

Coming softly into the room which

Elsie Bellwood occupied, Inza Burrage saw Elsie in tears.

"What is it, dear?" Inza asked, going up and putting her arms about Elsie's neck.

Except for a tell-tale bit of courtplaster Inza showed no sign of the dangerous and exciting experiences through which she had that day passed.

"Don't! don't!" Elsie pleaded, with a little shiver. "If you knew what was in my heart you wouldn't speak to me, Inza Burrage!"

"Why, dear? Why wouldn't I speak to you—you who have proved yourself the most heroic and courageous girl in all New Haven?"

"It wasn't courage half so much as it was fright. And if you knew the thoughts I had!"

Inza kissed her.

"What?"

Elsie turned on her a horrified face.

"Inza, when I saw you knocked down by that horse, the awful wish came into my heart that you might be killed. And even when I saw the tiger about to leap on you, I couldn't drive that thought away. I have been hating you in a way that I never thought I could hate anybody! You see, I began to fear that you were trying to come between me and Frank; and if you had been—killed—there—would—have—been—an—end—of—that!"

"But you rushed between me and the tiger. And you fought the beast with that goad. You, a girl, standing between me and such a terror as that! Frank has told me all about it—about how brave you were! It was beautiful!"

"When I felt how wicked my thought was, there came an awful revelation of feeling; and then I rushed into the street, not caring if I was killed, if I could only save you. I felt that the sacrifice of my life, even, if it were necessary, was de-

NEW YORK, MAY 12, 1900.

(РЪСТАЮЩЕ КЪК.)

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RECEIPTS.—Receipt of your remittance is acknowledged by proper change of number on your label. If not correct you have not been properly credited, and should let us know at once.

We are greatly pleased to hear that the Tip Top is read and liked in far-off Australia. Its readers are spreading very far in all parts of the world and we trust and believe its influence as well. We would like to hear from you soon.

I think the Tip Top is the only pebble on the beach. I admire Frank more than any of the rest of them. In reading a letter from Eugene Latta in the applause column I thought that it was the best that I have seen. I think just the way he does—that Elsie ought to marry Frank. Inza is too selfish. Long live Tip Top, Frank Merriwell and Mr. Standish.

FRANK WOODS,
Passumpsic, Vt.

Thank you.

I would like to have a little say about the Inza-Elsie question which the readers are bothering so much about. Let Frank choose for himself. I would not like a host of my friends to say what girl I was to marry. It is all foolishness. I am neutral in the present controversy. I am not going to mix up in any arguments, although I am not a new reader. My dear fellow-readers, do not let this question agitate you so. I am sure Mr. Standish will bring out everything all right in the end, which I hope is far off.

J. R.,
Pittsburg, Pa.

Of course, in the end, Mr. Standish must be the one to decide, but, in the meanwhile, he has taken a great interest in the opinions and arguments so cleverly advanced by his readers.

Dere vos a pook vot dey calls Dip Dop
Mit a poy derein name Hans:
He vos Dutch like me,
Uut den you can see
Vy I dinks so much of Hans.

Yeou people are wonderin' what I be doin'—
Vall, neow I be readin' Tip Top;
Yeou quit your frettin' and stewin',
For I don't intend to stop!

Inza, so proud and beautiful,
Should at each heartstring pull.
For at Fardale she was Frank's "queen,"
Before soft Elsie came between.

Three cheers for Mr. Standish,
The author of Tip Top;
May his good works continue,
And success be at the top.
May his life be filled with glory,
And as he writes each story,
Think of the many who hail it with delight.

MISS M. E. M. B.,
Toledo, Ohio.

We are much indebted to you for your verses, and Mr. Standish appreciates your pleasant words.

I have just finished reading No. 206, and the stories get better every week. I also have a few words to say about the Do and Dare Weekly. I have read them all, and I think they are as much of a success as the Tip Top, and that is saying a great deal. I am also going to read Comrades, and I think and hope it will be a success. I have read from No. 5 up to the present number, and I think Frank can't be beat. Elsie is the girl for Frank, and I would request all the Inza admirers to read "Frank Merriwell's Choice." There is a very poor imitation of the Tip Top, and as H. W. Raines, in No. 206 says, "the hero is in Manila one day and South Africa the next." You have selected a very good name for your paper, for it is indeed "tip top." Buck Badger is a character to study, and also Bart Hodge. I hope Buckrum will soon become Frank's friend, and Jack Ready, who is always ready for fun, also. My best wishes to Burt L. Standish, Mr. Norris, and last, but not least, Street & Smith. One of Elsie's admirers.

H. V. M.,
Chicago, Ill.

Both Do and Dare and Comrades are doing finely. All those who admire the Tip Top should read them. Regards from all. See correspondence column.

I have read the Tip Top Weekly from No. 1 to No. 206, and have not as yet expressed my opinion of it, but that goes without saying. I think it is one of the best papers ever published. Frank is certainly a model example of the American youth. I also like Bart Hodge, and I do not think he is quite the unreasonable fellow that Mr. Donald Edgar Carey (begging his pardon), in No. 206, believes him to be. Of course, he is unreasonable at times, but who of us is not? And I think Bart has showed he is not altogether bad in No. 105 by his loyalty to Jim Hooker. Hodge is my favorite of all of Frank's friends, but I like them all. I like both girls, but I think Inza should be Frank's choice, and I do not see that he loves Elsie the best. I think he himself said he felt for Elsie the love of a brother. Some say that when he loved Inza he was only a boy, but I beg those few to remember he is only nineteen now. Mr. Ed. D. Baker, in No. 206, brings out that Frank loved Elsie best because he saved her life so many times. But has he not also saved the lives of his worst enemies many times? That can scarcely count in Elsie's favor. It only brings out the true heroism of Frank, and he would have saved Inza's life equally as soon. May the Tip Top, Frank Merriwell and all his friends live forever.

ELVA W.,
So. Omaha, Neb.

We are confident Bart will win friends as time goes on. His is a peculiar nature, but he is struggling hard to overcome his faults. Frank believes in him, and that counts for a good deal. As to the two girls, their admirers on either side have certainly put forth strong arguments.

Having read a great deal lately in the applause column on the Elsie-Inza question, I thought I would express my opinion. Inza is a very nice girl, but she thinks more of Frank's deeds than she does of him. I see in one of the letters in No. 184 that is signed the "Merriwell Club" they say Elsie is too selfish to make a good wife. I think it is the other way, as Inza is more selfish than Elsie. I am waiting for the time when Frank marries, and sincerely hope that Elsie (dear girl) will be the lucky one. Frank Merriwell novels are certainly tip top, and I wish them great success.

MARGARET SAGE,
Chicago, Ill.

We do not think that either of the girls could exactly be called selfish. Frank has much to accomplish before he can think of marrying. Thanks for your good wishes.

Having read every Tip Top from No. 1 to the present issue, I thought I would write and let you know what I think of it. I think, although I have read many other weeklies, that the Tip Top outclasses them all by a large margin. I noticed in the applause of Tip Top No. 200, a very interesting article from Mr. Joe Bush, of Beatrice, Neb., where he brings out many good points in favor of Inza. But, Mr. Bush, there are many others that would like to say something in favor of Elsie, and I am one of them. I noticed one good point Mr. Bush brought out was when Inza stayed with Frank constantly at his bedside when he was sick while working on the railroad. I agree with Mr. Bush on this matter, but, my good friends, did not Elsie do as much and more for Frank? Of course she did. Did not Elsie save Frank's life when he was attacked on the Brooklyn Bridge and about to be thrown to his death below? Also in a recent number of Tip Top did she not fight and again save Frank, although not his money, from the bear (?) and the Italian? Again Elsie saves Frank's life when he was strapped to the log and the saw was about to cut him in half. And there are other ways that I have not space to relate here that Elsie shows her love for Frank. Did she not suffer great pain while trying to argue with Frank and Inza that she came between them, and it was better they part? My young readers, fancy yourself in the same place and see if I am not right. Who would say Frank does not show his love for Elsie where he saves her from being run over and likely killed by the fire engine while she was running away from Scudder? Also, did he not save Elsie from the burning ship, the burning house and the sinking ship, saved her from the gorilla while he was on his travels, and he also saved her many times from being kidnapped. Do not these few facts show Elsie's great love for Frank and Frank's great love for Elsie?

CLARENCE D. SUYDAM,

Brooklyn, N. Y.

Elsie has certainly proved that she cared a great deal for Frank, and you have advanced a strong plea in her favor.

I have been a constant reader of the Tip Top for over a year, and feel as if it is my duty to join in the applause. Mr. Standish is certainly a great writer. I think that he, like Shakespeare, has a claim to the title of "myriad minded man." One would think when they read of his stretching a green rope and grafting a bounda that he certainly had spent most of his life cow punching on the Western range. In everything else he shows that he knows just what he is writing about.

I agree with Joe Bush in No. 200, that Inza is the girl for Frank. Elsie seems to me to be more like an animated doll baby than anything else. May the Tip Top never "play out" is the fervent wish of

J. N. S.,
Victor, Col.

We think you scarcely do Elsie justice. She has frequently proved that she has both heart and brain. You need have no fear that the Tip Top will "play out."

Having read your Tip Top Library ever since it was published, I want to let you know what I think of it. I appreciate it very highly, and it shows what a young man with good judgment and courage can do. I hope to hear from Hans Dunnerwust soon.

CHAS. PLEVENY,
Cleveland, Ohio.

Thank you. Hans is now in New Haven, as you have probably seen.

Not having seen any letters in your applause column from the Cincinnati girls, I feel as though I must write to let you know that at least two Cincinnati girls read and enjoy the Tip Top Weekly. My sister and I think they are just fine. Inza is my favorite of the girls. I think if every American boy would endeavor to be as brave, noble and true as Merry, both in school and out, they would get along much better. Of Frank's friends I like Harry Rattleton best, then Hodge, Diamond and Bruce. I like Buck Badger very much, and I think he will be a good friend to Merry some time. I think Gene Skelding and Morton Agnew are just about as mean as can be. As for Rupert Chickering, he is too sneaking for any use. I liked Paul Raines very much. I suppose I must stop now, but I think I could write all night and then not say enough in praise of Frank Merriwell and his chums. Three cheers for Inza and Frank.

W. K. M., a Queen City girl,
Cincinnati, Ohio.

It is always a great pleasure for us to hear from our girl readers, and Mr. Standish is proud that he is able to so deeply interest both girls and boys.

I have read your paper for two years past, and am very much pleased with it. I think Frank Merriwell is a good example for lots of boys and girls. Long life to Burt L. Standish and Street & Smith.

HARRY MILLER,
Benton Harbor, Mich.

Thank you.

There seems to be quite an argument going on among the correspondents as to who Frank Merriwell shall wed. Some say Inza, some say Elsie. Allow me to give my opinion. I don't think that Frank should marry either Inza or Elsie, for he is young and hardly knows what love is. I think he likes both of the girls, but as for thinking of either of them for a wife, I don't believe he ever thought of it. In No. 206 Ed. D. Baker tells how Frank has saved Elsie's life so often, and he thinks this is one reason why he should marry her. I don't think so. Would Frank Merriwell see any girl in peril and not try to save her? No. Did he go to Elsie's rescue just because it was Elsie? No. He would do just as much to save any one's life. I think when Frank is through college and has settled in business, and thinks seriously of marriage, it will not be either Inza or Elsie; his love for them is just a boyish friendship. Pardon me for expressing myself so strongly, but I do so love the Tip Top Weekly that I just can't help writing what I think. But I suppose we all reason differently.

MRS. M. V. G.,
Sunbury, Pa.

There is no reason for apologizing. It is a pleasure for us to receive and print your opinion. No, we do not all reason in the same manner. It would be a dull world if we did.

Since its first edition the Tip Top has been a source of much pleasure to me. I notice that many of your correspondents are keeping up the Elsie-Inza controversy. Now, as to myself, I have been an admirer of Inza ever since she appeared at Fardale. While I think Elsie is just as sweet as she can be, yet I like Inza's style, her determination, her strong character, and many other fine qualities. Many object to her temper. Well now, who does not like to see a girl with some spirit and the courage to show it? I must say that Jack Diamond is my favorite, but that is easily understood. But Bruce is all right. Tell Mr. Standish that the next time Frank's flock and the girls get together to have an old-time "Ferginy cakewalk." I am sure that Jack can instruct them, and they will have a good time.

HARRY MORBY,
Lexington, Va.

We will tell Mr. Standish of your suggestion. Very glad that the Tip Top gives you so much pleasure.

LATEST ISSUES.

- 213—Frank Merriwell's Handicap; or, The Heroism of Elsie.
- 212—Frank Merriwell's Football; or, The Disappearance of Jack Ready.
- 211—Frank Merriwell's Reward; or, Buck Badger's Humiliation.
- 210—Frank Merriwell's Honor; or, The Nobility of Badger.
- 209—Frank Merriwell's Five; or, Old Friends at Yale.
- 208—Frank Merriwell's Theory; or, A Fight for a Friend.
- 207—Frank Merriwell's Influence; or, Inza, the Mascot of the Crew.
- 206—Frank Merriwell's Mishap; or, A Friend in the Guise of a Foe.
- 205—Frank Merriwell Deceived; or, A Heart of Gold.
- 204—Frank Merriwell's Opponent; or, For the Ice Hockey Cup.
- 203—Frank Merriwell's Musketeers; or, The Mountain Vendetta.
- 202—Frank Merriwell's Sleigh; or, Warm Hearts and Brave Hands.
- 201—Frank Merriwell's Ice Yacht; or, Wing and Wing.
- 200—Frank Merriwell's Skates; or, Into the Ice Trap.
- 199—Frank Merriwell's Work; or, In Training for Spring Sports.
- 198—Frank Merriwell's Temptation; or, Nothing but Quiet Sport.
- 197—Frank Merriwell's "Flock"; or, The Awakening of Badger.
- 196—Frank Merriwell Tested; or, A Doubtful Honor.
- 195—Frank Merriwell's Limit; or, Calling a Halt.
- 194—Frank Merriwell's Stratagem; or, True Friends and False.
- 193—Frank Merriwell's Holidays; or, A Merry Christmas with Old Friends.
- 192—Frank Merriwell's Touch; or, Light as a Feather, Yet Heavy as Iron.
- 191—Frank Merriwell's Generosity; or, Square as a Brick.
- 190—Frank Merriwell's Drive; or, Defeating the Professionals.

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